

**The effect of mass media and social network diversity vs. homogeneity on political attitudes and prejudice: The case of Taiwan** - Professor James H. Liu

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**Abstract:** People with high social trust, high civic engagement, and rich horizontal social networks are depicted as having high level of social capital. According to Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, they are likely to have high potential for political participation as well as a high level of tolerance, and hence contribute to a healthy democracy. In this presentation will explore a conditional limitation to this theory: the condition being that people's social networks should not be divided up so as to exclude heterogeneous members. If people are divided into different social networks with different social identities that have weak ties between camps, “within group” social capital may promote social conflict and antagonism between groups and depress deliberation on possible alternatives of action, all of which are deterrents for liberal democracy. Politically biased mass media would exacerbate these interpersonal tendencies at the societal level. Our data show that mass media, particularly newsprint and to a lesser extent television news, are readily identifiable for their political leanings in Taiwan: that is, unlike in many societies, where mass media are perceived to be politically neutral, Taiwanese people can identify whether newspapers and TV news stations are pro-KMT/reunification or pro-DPP/independence. Data from over 400 adults suggest that mass media preferences appear to be linked to the political leanings of people's social networks and social identities, so that people who have social networks favouring one political party also tend to read particular newspapers and listen to particular television stations that favour the political views espoused by the political party that they and the people in their social network prefer. Preliminary analyses suggest that Taiwan appears to be a polarizing society, where mass media and interpersonal social relationships work together to insulate competing political viewpoints from one another, and contribute to a fragmenting of opinion in society as a whole where people are reluctant to discuss political matters with people who have different points of view.

**Speaker:** James Hou-fu Liu is Associate Professor of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington and Deputy Director of its Centre for Applied

Cross Cultural Research. He was born in Taiwan and grew up in the United States. He completed a PhD in social psychology in 1992 at UCLA. He has been at Victoria University since 1994. His research speciality is in the intersection of cross-cultural psychology, and inter-group relations and social identity. He specializes in the study of identity and social representations of history, and has more than 80 academic publications. He was Secretary General of the Asian Association of Social Psychology 2003-2007, Treasurer from 1999-2003, and is now Editor-Elect of the *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*.